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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4192
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 3458
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RHMFISS/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
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UNCLAS BEIRUT 000169

SIPDIS
SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA
ALSO FOR I/O PDAS WARLICK
P FOR DRUSSELL AND RRANGASWAMY
USUN FOR WOLFF/GERMAIN/SCHEDLBAUER
NSC FOR SHAPIRO/MCDERMOTT

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [LE](#)

SUBJECT: LEBANON: PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS SNAPSHOT: THE METN

REF: A. BEIRUT 91

[1](#)B. 08 BEIRUT 1729

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (U) This is the third in a series of snapshots we are producing on key electoral districts ("qada") in the run-up to the June 7, 2009 parliamentary elections.

[1](#)2. (SBU) The Metn is one of six electoral districts in the Mount Lebanon administrative area. There are eight parliamentary seats in this Christian stronghold, seven of which are currently held by MPs of Michel Aoun's Change and Reform bloc. The eighth seat is held by independent politician and Metn powerbroker Michel Murr. The parliamentary race in Metn is expected to be one of the most hotly contested in Lebanon. Currently, analysts predict that Aoun's bloc will win six seats, Murr will take one, and Kataeb's Sami Gemayel will win the seat his brother Pierre occupied when he was assassinated in 2006. Regardless of the result, all eyes in Lebanon will be on the behavior of the unpredictable Michel Murr, who ran with Aoun's bloc in the 2005, then pulled out of it in early 2008, as well as on the voting patterns of the significant Armenian population of the district. End summary.

METN: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

[1](#)3. (U) The Metn is a wealthy Christian district north and east of Beirut (the U.S. Embassy is located in the Metn), with a diverse mixture of Christian sects and a very small Muslim minority. It is the stronghold of independent Greek Orthodox politician Michel Murr, who holds great sway over its voters, as well as of the Gemayel family, whose home village of Bikfaya is located in the district.

[1](#)4. (U) The distribution of the Metn's eight parliamentary seats is: four Maronites, two Greek Orthodox, one Armenian Orthodox, and one Greek Catholic. In the 2005 elections, Murr ran on a list with Aoun's candidates, and they swept seven seats, leaving one open for Kataeb's Pierre Gemayel. After Gemayel's assassination in 2006, Murr's support in the Metn helped Camille Khoury, the candidate of Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), defeat Pierre Gemayel's father, the former president Amine Gemayel, in the 2007 by-election to fill Pierre's seat. In March 2008, the independent-minded

Murr withdrew from Aoun's bloc. Thus currently seven seats are held by MPs allied with Michel Aoun's Change and Reform bloc, while Murr holds one Greek Orthodox seat.

FACTORS AT PLAY
IN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

¶5. (SBU) Murr's defection from Aoun's bloc changed the political calculus of the Metn. The Armenian Tashnaq party, long-time allies of Michel Murr, forged their own political alliance with FPM for the 2005 elections, and most Embassy contacts see that alliance as stable, barring a change in heart from March 14 leader Saad Hariri, who has resisted overtures by the Armenians (reftels). Murr maintains that Tashnaq will be part of his independent list, but as of now, Tashnaq contacts tell us they will likely support Murr himself for a Metn seat, but not the rest of his list, preferring to stay with Aoun. With fifteen percent of the Metn electorate, the Armenian community has often swung the vote in the Metn, notably in the 2007 by-election.

¶6. (SBU) Meanwhile, Murr announced February 5 that he will run on the same list with Sami Gemayel, Pierre's brother. Analysts currently predict that Murr and Gemayel will win seats, while the other six would go to Aoun's bloc, which essentially means no change compared to 2005.

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